



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: April 1 to June 30, 2005

**WEST BANK AND GAZA: International Observation of Voter Registration (04859)
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-00004-00**

**Project dates: September 1, 2004 to September 30, 2005
Total budget: \$200,000.00 Expenses to date: \$145,321.15**

I. SUMMARY

Due to concerns about the quality and accuracy of the civil registry developed in preparation for the 1996 elections, the Palestinian Central Election Commission (CEC) decided to create an entirely new voter list. On September 4, 2004 the CEC began registering voters in more than 1,000 centers throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The voter registration period, scheduled to run from September 4, 2004 to October 7, 2004, was initially extended for one additional week. NDI released a preliminary statement on this process on October 7, 2004.

Following Yasser Arafat's death and the announcement that presidential elections were to be held, the CEC reopened voter registration on November 24 for eight days to accommodate voters wishing to register for the upcoming election. Following the registration process, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) passed an amendment to the electoral law requiring the CEC to permit unregistered eligible voters to vote provided their names appear in the civil registry. In late December, CEC staff began door-to-door canvassing in Jerusalem to register eligible voters. The CEC has also indicated it will reopen the voter registration process prior to the PLC elections.

This quarter NDI monitored the re-registration period with observers functioning as long-term observers for the local elections. Additionally, the Institute continues to negotiate to be allowed to conduct an extensive audit of the voter registration list. Due to the postponement of local and legislative elections, there is an increased chance of registration being opened for additional periods.

II. BACKGROUND

Due to concerns about the quality and accuracy of the civil registry developed in preparation for the 1996 elections, the CEC decided to create an entirely new voter list. On September 4, 2004 the CEC began registering voters in more than 1000 centers throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The voter registration period, scheduled to run from September 4, 2004 to October 7, 2004, was initially extended for one additional week. Throughout the five-week registration period political challenges, with origins in both Israeli and Palestinian politics, appeared to overshadow any technical difficulties.

No agreement was reached between the Palestinians and Israelis regarding the registration of voters in Jerusalem and on September 13, the Acting Israeli Minister for Internal Security Gideon Ezra ordered the CEC to close all voter registration centers in the geographic area considered by Israel to be within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, a total of six centers.

According to the CEC, 1,111,868 people, 67 percent of the estimated number of eligible voters, registered in more than 1,000 centers throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the five week registration period. Nineteen thousand names were subsequently removed from the voters' list, decreasing the number of registered voters to 1,092,856. Forty-six percent of registrants were female.

Following Arafat's death and the announcement that presidential elections were to be held, the CEC reopened voter registration on November 24 for eight days to accommodate voters wishing to register for the upcoming election. The exhibition and challenge period, during which voters had the opportunity to modify incorrect or missing information regarding their own registration or challenge the eligibility of others who appear on the list, was held from December 2-6.

Following the registration process, the PLC passed an amendment to the electoral law requiring the CEC to permit unregistered eligible voters to vote provided their names appear in the civil registry. In accordance with this legal mandate, the CEC decided to establish 66 special polling centers where those who only appear on the civil registry may vote. The CEC cross checked names on the civil registry with those on the newly created voter registry in order to remove names appearing on both lists. In late December, CEC staff began door-to-door canvassing in Jerusalem to register eligible voters.

The CEC reopen the voter registration process prior to the PLC elections, originally scheduled for July 17, 2005 but now postponed.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

During this quarter, NDI monitored the re-opened registration process from 16 May to 21 May 2005. The Institute deployed two long-term observers, already in the field to monitor local elections, to monitor the registration process.

West Bank:

NDI Long Term Observer conducted meetings with District Coordinators and/or PR/Electoral Affairs Officers in all West Bank District Electoral Offices, and visited 54 registration centers in the following locations:

- Hebron Governorate: Beit Ommar, Halhoul, city of Hebron;
- Bethlehem Governorate: Aydah Camp, Al E'zza Camp, Beit Jala, city of Bethlehem.
- Salfet Governorate: city of Salfet, Farkha;
- Ramallah Governorate: Qarawa Bani Zeyd, Kafr Eien, Al Nabi Sahel, Bani Zeyd, Umm Safa, Al Bireh, city of Ramallah, Beitona Al Am'ari camp;
- Jerusalem Governorate: Kafr Aqab, Qalandya camp, Al Ram, Hizma.
- Jericho Governorate: Al 'Ouja, Jeftlik, city of Jericho, Aqbet Jaber Camp;
- Tubas Governorate: city of Tubas, Al Far'a Camp;
- Nablus Governorate: city of Nablus, Balata Camp, Al Bathan.
- Jenin Governorate: Al Jalameh, Dhaheyet Sabah Al Kheer, city of Jenin, Jenin Camp;
- Tulkarem Governorate: city of Tulkarem and Ezbet Shoufeh;
- Qalqilya Governorate: city of Qalqilya.

Gaza:

NDI LTO met or made contact with the Central Elections Commission (CEC) at the regional and district levels as well as other relevant interlocutors (NGOs, political parties, domestic monitoring groups) in the below governorates. In addition, NDI LTO observed the exhibition/challenges and supplementary voter registration process at registration centers, mobile registration stands and the registration exercises ran with the 'clan families' in their 'dewans'.

Governorates and areas visited/covered by team:

- Northern Gaza (Beit Lahya, Biet Hannon, Jabillia Camp, Al Qaraya, Al Badawiya)
- Gaza (Al Shija'iyah, Beach Camp, Al Daraj , Al Tuffah, Al Zaitoun)
- Deir Al Belah (Deir Al Belah Town, Al Bureij, Al Maghazi, Al Nusariat)
- Khan Younis (Khan Younis Camp, Al Amal, Al Sheik Masser, Bani Suhalla, Absan Al Kabirah)
- Rafah (Al Junaina, Rafah Camp, Tal Al Sultan)

NDI also negotiated with the Central Election Commission for the release of the voter registration lists in order to allow for an extensive audit of the list. The institute agreed that the voter list audit will be done after the CEC completes their own internal audit and will likely begin at the end of October.

The Institute completed the interim report on the voter registration process, see appendix.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The following achievements can be cited toward the two objectives of this program:

- Demonstrate international support for, and interest in, the electoral process in the West Bank and Gaza through the deployment of international monitors to assess and report on the critical voter registration period, thereby promoting confidence in the integrity of the process to the degree warranted.
- Strengthen the electoral process by identifying real or potential problems in the voter registration system and offering recommendations to the CEC.
 - NDI monitored the registration process.
 - NDI successfully negotiated with the CEC to perform an audit of the voter registration lists.

V. EVALUATION

The overall voter registration process went well with no complaints reported during the challenge period.

Based on LTO reports, the general situation can be summarized as follows:

- Interest in the supplementary registration/exhibition and challenges period has not been overwhelming. However, with the introduction of proxy registration for first degree relatives as well as the targeting of the 'large clans' by the CEC in all districts, registration rates have begun to increase. CEC staff also informed NDI LTO that they attribute a rise in numbers to the announcement by the PLC that the Civil Register will not be used in the forthcoming elections.
- Based on observations it can be concluded that mobile registration (either via the CEC targeting clans or by stands set up in the centre of cities and the larger towns) has been considerably more successful in gaining public interest than the registration centers.
- It appears that this period is being viewed by all interested parties including the CEC as more of a supplementary registration period as than an Exhibition and Challenges period. All CEC employees at the regional, district and centre level report that a small

percentage of registered voters come to check their details on the voter register. NDI LTO agrees with this assessment based on their own observations.

- The main political parties appear to be playing a reasonably active role in encouraging supporters and ‘independent citizens’ still on the civil registry to register on the official voters list. This has been facilitated by the CEC who have provided all parties approved by the Ministry of Interior, with a CD containing the names of citizens still on the civil register who have not yet registered on the voters list.
- NGO observation of the registration period has not been particularly active; it appears that the most active NGOs are small Islamic groups. Some NGOs reported that they have chosen to focus their resources on monitoring the court cases as they view them as a priority.
- The CEC is carrying out a professional and high profile public awareness campaign and their efforts to increase registration rates should be commended. All interlocutors have reported positively on the professionalism and neutrality displayed in their work.
- While NDI LTO can report that the majority of registration centers are clearly marked and the staff appear well trained the conditions of the centers vary. LTO has also observed that in some centers staff independently decide when they should close rather than adhering to the official closing times.
- The rising tensions across the Gaza strip, but particularly in the South (Rafah and Khan Younis) in part relating to the rulings announced by the court for the local elections and in part caused by the worsening security situation are reported by some as having an adverse effect on public interest in the supplementary registration/exhibition period.

NDI is currently waiting to conduct an audit on the voter registration list until after the CEC has had a chance to do an internal audit.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

- NDI will continue to monitor new rounds of voter registration.
- Phase three of the program, during which NDI will conduct physical tests of the final voter list, has been delayed due to recent changes in the voter list mandated by the PLC. After NDI receives the final list from the CEC, the Institute will conduct the physical tests of the list and write a final report assessing the voter registration process as a whole.